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ABSTRACT

Teacher members of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) describe the study of current events as essential or very important to the social studies curriculum. Most teachers indicated using current events to provide contemporary examples of abstract historical, social, economic, and political concepts or to illustrate the continuity of social issues over time and across cultures. A number of teachers indicated that current events help to teach inquiry as a process. This paper describes ways that teachers can use the study of current events in the classroom, such as individual student reports, cooperative group reporter strategy, and long-term in-depth study of a single event. The document enumerates readily available media instructional resources for current events, such as C-SPAN, "Time" and "Newsweek," local newspapers, and television networks Web sites. It cites categories for assessing and evaluating student works with current events. (BT)

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# Multiple Strategies for Teaching Current Events

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**Multiple Strategies for Teaching Current Events**

On a regular basis current events reported in the print and non-print media include national and international topics such as elections and their results; conflicts within and between nations; the collapse of businesses; immigration to the United States; and natural disasters caused by nature and people. Often local issues concerning highway construction; bridge repair; the quality of drinking water; or the proposed location for new public facilities are events that generate ongoing debate and discussion in the local community. The study of these and other such topics enables students to examine multiple perspectives and a range of opinions and experiences.

Teacher members of the National Council for the Socials Studies (NCSS) described the study of current events as " essential" or "very important" to the social studies curriculum. Most teachers indicated using current events to provide contemporary examples of abstract historical, social, economic, and political concepts or to illustrate the continuity of social issues over time and across cultures.

Teachers replied that by studying current events students learn such values, virtues, and dispositions as a respect for a diversity of opinions, the need to be informed citizens, recognition of the need to protect the rights of all, recognition of globalism and interdependence, and building empathy for others. A number of teachers indicated that current events help to teach inquiry as a process. These teachers used cognitive skills to identify facts, recognize bias, point of view, perspectives, and exaggeration in their teaching of current events. (Haas and Laughlin, 2000).

Recently my hairdresser related an interesting story about her experiences in high school. She shared this information since she knows that I am a teacher of teachers. She recalled that when she was in school that on a regular basis she and her classmates were required to bring in current event articles related to social studies. Within this context she remembered that her teacher made negative comments about the content of the articles. He also informed the students that they failed to bring in important current event articles. Today, after twenty years, all she remembered is that she did not learn in school what she believes she should have learned about her

world. Her teacher failed his students by not helping them to make connections between the events going on throughout the world and their lives.

**Individual Student Reports**

Even today in a world that is much more complex and intertwined, many students are unable to make such connections without teacher guidance. The emphasis on standards, standardized testing, and performance assessment has resulted in many teachers sincerely believing that there is little or no time to teach about current events. Consequently, the periodic reporting of a current event by individual students to their classmates continues to be a common approach to teaching about current events. This approach focuses on encouraging students to locate an article, to read it for factual information, and to communicate the information to classmates. Such an approach to current events places more emphasis on literacy skills to the neglect of citizenship skills. A key responsibility for teachers is to teach citizenship skills to students by focusing attention in assignment on people and communities. Helping

students establish criteria for the selection of articles for their reporting of current events is a requirement for social studies teachers. Students need to be encouraged to ask themselves "What is important enough about this event that I and others should be concerned and devote valuable time to learning about it?" In responding to this question students need to identify the information and its relationship both in the cognitive and the affective domains.

Using current events in classes requires real social studies goals. Matching the social studies goals and the skills of the students is essential, but so also is the selection of important social studies content and classroom organization and management. To compensate for a lack of time while still incorporating current events teachers report that they use current events as examples of concepts and issues that are a part of their regular curriculum such as: supreme court decisions, tracking a piece of state or national legislation, and topics before the local or county commissions such as bridge building, pollutions control, healthcare, etc.

**Cooperative Group Reporter Strategy**

Teachers often devote some special class time to current events and might organize their approach through the use of cooperative groups for information reporting. Using the Internet and other news resources the students who are regional reporters make periodical reports about their world region throughout the semester. In this way current events that emerge over time are traced by the group members who make periodic reports to the class and serve as resource providers for events that develop such as natural disasters or other crises. As students consider current events, they should ask questions such as:

What is the origin of the event or issue?

What degree of potential success is there if future leaders act or fail to act on the issue or respond to the event?

How does the event impact people in the local community and other nations?

**Long-term In-depth Study of a Single Event**

Some teachers decide to take a single incident and create an in-depth study of some event that dominates the news for several days such as the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Jimmy Carter. Some events may have a positive impact on students and their world while others may have a negative impact. In using any event it is important that students gather information from various news sources, discuss the information from various perspectives, and draw implications concerning the meaning of the event to the lives of people. This approach combines learning of content and skills development enabling students to clarify their values and perspectives. When examining events it is important that students should be encouraged to ask, "So what questions." And "what does this mean?" Such questions should be broad and open-ended inviting multiple responses.

When making this type of assignment it is incumbent upon the teacher to assist students to obtain the necessary background information, establish the accuracy of data, organize the data, communicate information about the event, and express their opinion

as appropriate. Essential to this teaching process is helping students establish criteria for the selection of articles to be examined. The teaching of such skills could be an introductory instructional unit prior to the study of current event topics. For example, students should note differences, if any, between a newspaper account of an event and the presentation of the event on television or in a news magazine. They should identify the advantages of various forms of reporting the news and decide what is the best way to secure the entire story and get to the accuracy of the reporting. This type of learning activity focuses on thinking skills in making decision that incorporate reflection on personal preferences, values, and ethics.

Teachers have reported that students fail to read the newspaper or listen to news broadcast (radio and television) at home. Most likely teachers will need to provide time and resources at school for student use. There is a wealth of instructional materials available to assist teachers in dealing with current events.

For many years the major news organizations have made available their products as reduced costs to schools. Time and Newsweek also have educational packages that include charts, maps, background articles and related materials. They also provide teachers guides for each issue of the magazine to teacher whose classes subscribe to their magazine as part of their instructional materials. In recent years these organizations have begun publishing weekly news information for elementary students.

Scholastic began as a publisher of current events materials for youth more than fifty years ago. Today they publish weekly magazines with teacher guides and special units on events and places.

Local newspapers are often participants in the Newspapers In Education (NIE). NIE is a program to provide newspapers to schools for student use. They have teacher's guides and offer workshops to help teachers with ways of using the newspaper as an educational

resource. Check with your local newspaper on the availability of this program.

Large newspapers such as the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times have educational programs available for the teachers. Each day the New York Times selects an article from its paper and places a lesson plan for that article at its website. These are prepared by educators at Bank Street College and can be downloaded with the article for use in classes.

C-Span provides many resources for teachers. Teachers can download lesson plans and record broadcasts for use in the classroom. Check the C-Span website for a schedule of the programs in your area. Broadcasting is done in the early morning hours.

Television networks have websites that provide news updates and additional information on news stories about which they are reporting. Most newspapers have portions of their current issues

available at a website and allow free public access to archived materials for several days or weeks. This is also true of minority newspapers in the United States and major newspapers in other nations.

Categories for assessing and evaluating student work with current events might include:

1. Have the students used multiple resources to gain information?
2. Have the students identified various perspectives on the issue?
3. Have they recorded accurate notes?
4. Have the students identified facts from opinions?
5. Have the students reflected on the several perspectives?
6. Have they shared the information with their classmates?
7. Have the students drawn tentative conclusions based on their information?
8. Have the students identified the importance of the article?
9. Did the students include bibliographic information on their notes and in their reports?

10. Is their summary/presentation in their own words with quotations identified with the author's name?

11. Are the authors of the articles identified by name and area of expertise?

12. Is the student's position on the issue or event based upon current evidence and logical reasoning?

Criteria for scoring each category of the assessment should be determined by individual teachers and based upon the skills students have been taught to apply. Teachers will probably need to work with the criteria for some time until they can establish a set of norms that indicate several descriptive levels of quality.

**Sources for current event materials prepared for the classroom:**

U.S. News Classroom Program. www.usmewsclassroom.com 1-(800) 736-9623.

Time Classroom. http://www.time.com

Newsweek. http://www.newsweek.com

CNN Students News. http://www.cnn.com/fyi/

News broadcast for class use record from CNN at 3:12 to 3:22 AM. Mon.- Fri.

C-Span. http://www.c-span.org/classroom

Use the News. http://www.usethenews.com/

The New York Times Learning Network Lesson Plan. http://www.nytimes.com/learning

A new social studies lesson is prepared every Monday and Wednesday based on an article appearing in that day's paper.

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